RECEIVED
2024 DEC 20 AM 9:31

**COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**
**Special Meeting**

Wednesday, December 18, 2024
5:30 PM
William J. Johnston Middle School

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT :** Chair Alexander Oliphant, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Margo Gignac, Donna Antonacci, Michelle Millington, Rosemary Gignac and Stefanie Tracey-Calash.

**ADMINISTRATION PRESENT :** Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Assistant Director of Pupil Services Rebecca Tedesco, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Melissa Cyr, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Principal Christopher Bennett, WJJMS Assistant Principal Stacey Ewings.

**OTHERS PRESENT :** Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Fratoni, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari, Hayward Academy for Public Service (HAPS) Development Coordinator Ashley Zaugg.

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   1.1. Call to Order
   Chair Oliphant called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM

   1.2 Roll Call
   All present

Superintendent Sullivan asked Principal Begué and Development Coordinator Ashley Zaugg to give a recap and recent updates on HAPS prior to Public Comment.
**What is HAPS** - They stated that HAPS would be a school within a school Magnet School operating within BA with four public service pathways with the option to go directly into employment upon graduation.
**Enrollment** - Out of District (OOD) students attending HAPS would have to perform accordingly to stay in the program, and in Colchester. If they do not perform, they would be sent back to their home district.
**Lottery** - 30% of the seats per grade are reserved for Hartford students. 25% of the seats per grade are reserved for Colchester students. The rest of the seats would be filled from the other 22 sending districts. They stated that unfilled classes have the option to be filled by BA students not enrolled in HAPS.

**Recruitment** - without attending any recruitment fairs so far, HAPS has 28 applicants. There are two recruitment fairs coming up in January and February that we are planning to attend.
**Cost** - the Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) has sent tuition for OOD students to be $13,500. Doing rough math, that means around $1.6 million dollars in tuition to cover the cost of running HAPS. Transportation and Special Education costs for OOD students would be covered by the sending district, not Colchester.
**Construction** - 95% of the construction costs would be covered by grants. The other 5% (roughly $60,000) would have to be covered by Colchester. For reference, quotes were obtained to see how much it would cost to remove the Portables at BA. It would cost close to $90,000. Again, these are quotes and are subject to change.
**Partnerships and Other Opportunities**- the partnership with the well renowned University of New Haven (UNH) is a huge opportunity. The classes are entry level that are highly transferable to other schools. This partnership will create opportunities for college bound and work bound students after graduation. HAPS will also create opportunities for the expansion of athletics and other revenue.

M. Gignac asked about the timeline for 2025. A. Zaugg stated that applications are due by February 7, 2025.
Superintendent Sullivan gave a comparison in revenue vs. cost for 50, 100 and 150 students paying tuition at HAPS. 50 students would get approximately $427,000. 100 students approximately $690,000 and 150 students would yield approximately $1.1 million dollars.

M. Millington asked about what start-up costs would look like for the taxpayers. Superintendent Sullivan stated that if enough of the community believed in the basis of the program and what the program could bring for Colchester to benefit as a town and community, then fiscally, fronting the $1.2 million would be the only hurdle. There is a possibility that the state would work with us to fund us and not ask us to put the money forward.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**
   2.1. For Public Comments, please see Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

**John Consiglio, Diane Lane** - asked about the burden on the taxpayer. Superintendent Sullivan stated that it would be 5% of the construction cost including the demo of the portables. He stated the portables need to be taken care of either way.

**Jason Lachapelle, Highwood Circle** - via Zoom stated that he is confused as to why this meeting is happening and not the Tri-Board Meeting that was proposed by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Board of Finance (BOF). He stated that the citizens and parents deserve a voice in their child's education. He also spoke about the Board's accountability on our students due to a recent event with his daughter.

**John Thomas, Debbie Circle** - via Zoom asked why this was not brought to the attention of the Town back in January when the process was started. He spoke about Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) for Colchester students being much higher than the tuition cost of the OOD student and why is it different. He spoke about how the Superintendent was tasked with increasing enrollment, but yet still asks for more money during Budget seasons. He stated that HAPS is going to suck more money out of the town that we don't have. He stated that the Town needs a vote and it should go to referendum.

**Erin Kaiser, Carriage Drive** - gave her support for HAPS. She stated that the Superintendent was asked to bring in revenue to offset the BOE budget. He is trying to do that and he is now being slandered and ridiculed for it. She stated that by design, magnet schools desegregate

urban areas and encourage learning among students of all colors and cultures. She stated that this is an amazing opportunity to bring to Colchester. She stated that the Republican Town Committee (RTC) has put out claims that HAPS will bring increased crime rates to our town and less playing time for town residents on high school teams. The implications of the racial undertones are dangerous and will set us back 100 years or more. Diversity, equity and inclusion are here to stay and we need to get on board for the sake of our children.

**John Farrell, Felicia Barber Lane** - via Zoom stated he does not feel the communication was handled properly and that he has concerns about the cost seeing how the number of new teachers needed seems to be changing a lot. He stated that this program could be a parasite to the host district.

**Michael Dubreuil, Woodbine Road** - stated that this is a disservice to the community and developed in secrecy. He stated that this will take spots away from local kids in sports. He stated that this is a financial risk with a lack of financial transparency. How can the town be expected to support this when you don't know how much it will cost. He stated that the state does not adequately fund magnet schools and the community deserves a say in the decision.

**Lynette Dimmock, Dutton Road** - via email expressed her support for the exciting opportunity that will benefit the students and school community. It will help boost enrollment and offer educational opportunities while earning college credits.

**Suzie Milner, Buckley Hill Road** - via Zoom commended the hard work and research up to this point. She stated that declining enrollment has an impact on the BA curriculum.

**Wendy Worley, North Court** - stated that her family moved to Colchester because of the demographics in a nice, peaceful neighborhood for the children to grow up. She spoke about the PPE of Colchester students being $11,000 more than the tuition cost of OOD students. She asked why we are having decreasing enrollment and why the town isn't bringing in young families and new businesses.

**Suzanne Salemi, Prospect Hill Road** - via email expressed her support. She believes this would be a huge loss to Colchester if it gets denied.

**Sarah Croucher, Woodbine Road** - via Zoom stated that she is excited to hear about this initiative. She stated that it is important for our children to engage with as many different communities as possible because that is the world they are going to grow up and live in. She is excited that students have the opportunity to receive credits towards higher education.

**Zachary Carr, Old Hebron Road** - stated that he only knew about this a few weeks ago. He stated the reason why he moved to Colchester was to get away from inner-city schooling and because of the demographics. He is not in favor and that the town should vote on it.

**Leann Laspino, Diane Lane** - via email stated her support for implementing HAPS as it provides opportunities for students.

**Mike Egan, Lebanon Ave** - via Zoom addressed the public comment made by a fellow BOF member John Thomas stating that this was discussed at the January 11, 2024 BOF meeting where he gave a report as the liaison. He stated that this initiative addressed the concerns brought before the BOE by the previous BOF chair on declining enrollment and additional revenue opportunities for Colchester kids.

**Brian Martin, Heatherwood Drive** - spoke about how BA students are going to other schools because BA hasn't been improved for years. The school needs support. He stated that he has been trying to get improvements for 12 years and Superintendent Sullivan is the first one to make any progress. Education is going in the direction of school choice, we need OOD kids to want to come to Colchester.

**Jeremy & Nicole McKenzie, Bull Hill Road** - via email applauded the Board for taking this step and loves the theme. They state that the program will help provide much needed diversity within the school as well as a revenue stream for the town that will help stabilize the budget and provide additional programming to students.

**Matthew Parsons, Taylor Road** - spoke about his personal experience with a magnet school startup. He spoke that tuition money would be coming in from magnet students instead of going out to other schools to pay for Colchester kids. He stated that this is a good benefit to the town and will bring in programs to have more options in school.

**Karen Belding, Deer Run Road** - via email, spoke of her questions:

- Rough estimate or cost range associated to the building and constriction portion of the project
- Key milestones or pieces of that project - need a building committee, bidding, design, etc and estimated timelines to estimate duration and reimbursement
- Details to the reimbursement mechanisms - requirements, timelines, etc
- Variables and likely progression for state funding decisions - if there are two possible, when will decision be made; impactful differences between them, etc
- What kind of funding mechanisms will be needed by the town - bonding, etc - to understand how it might affect other potential projects or priorities
- Written sample of high level cost/revenue expectations for program such as this - with examples of how it in turn impacts the overall BOE budget

**Tiffany Moroch, Maclyn Drive** - stated that she likes the idea but has some reservations and concerns regarding the special education cost and specialized equipment needed. She spoke of the demographics in the town, and if there would be an integration support plan for the magnet students that would be coming into the community. She stated that she has been following the magnet proposal since it began last year.

**Cliff O'Donal, New London Road** - stated that he feels that anything of this magnitude should be brought before the people of the town at referendum.

**Tim Vaillancourt, McDonald Road** - in response to Mike Egan's public comment, he stated that there was a short liaison report about it with no more details to follow. He also was upset that the RTC members were made out to be racist and he will not stand for it.

**Joe Brady, Goldberg Road** - he stated that the proposal has merit but it seems to be a draft proposal that seems like a scoping stage. He believes that this needs to go to referendum and a summary of the cost should be available to the taxpayers. He stated it seems like we are rushing.

**Bernie Dennler, First Selectman** - He stated that he respects the fact that the BOE took a step back to hear the citizens instead of moving forward with the Tri Board meeting with the BOS and BOF. He has concerns about the timeline and construction.

**Ashley Zaugg, Usher Swamp Road** - Stated that she agrees this feels rushed with inadequate information. She feels this is a wonderful opportunity for Colchester. She stated that this is about education for our children. This is not bringing a city into Colchester. She stated that we are working on the state's timeline and we do not want to lose out on this. Be open minded and come to an understanding together.

**Deanna Bouchard, Meadow Drive** - via Zoom, stated that she appreciates First Selectman Dennler's comments. She stated that the proposal needs a building, which would be on school property, which belongs to the town. She stated that no one spoke about the 30% of seats that would be held for Hartford students. She stated that the BOE has not taken the time to listen to the people of the town. She stated that when Dr. Hewes was on staff, he was working on curriculum in the public safety realm.

**Jill Hagen, Cambridge Court** - via Zoom, spoke that she used to live in MA where school choice was a real thing. She stated that the best and the brightest left as soon as they were able because the schools were not funded or progressed. The district pays for those students to leave and attend another school. She stated that if we do not move forward and make our education better and more diverse, we will lose the best and brightest kids.

**Jocelyn Anastasiou, Tanglewood Drive** - stated that everyone wants what is best for our students and the town. She stated that the overall issue seems to be the lack of transparency. She said she sees the benefits but there is not a good plan being presented to the town.

**Kristen Norige, Gary Lane** - feels as though there was a lack of transparency, communication and identifying risks associated with the project. She is upset that there was no mention of this project in any of the First Selectman's weekly updates in the past year. She stated that this needs to go to referendum.

**Lea Poresky, Settlers Lane** - stated that there was so much missing information and details and she is struggling to see what the benefit is for Colchester and other BA students. She asked if the proposed pathways are of high desire or just in high demand. She asked what the plan for the revenue is and would like to see a financial plan that spans the next ten years.

**Donna Gray, Lebanon Ave** - stated that for years, she has been asking about bringing back the Gifted and Talented program and has constantly been told that we do not have the money. She asked what is going to happen to our younger students when more money is needed for the high school.

3. **<u>*PRIORITY DISCUSSION / ACTION ITEMS</u>**

3.1. *Discussion and Possible Action on Hayward Academy for Public Service

S. Tracey-Calash is struggling with the timeline, the cost and the fact that budget season is approaching. Despite these challenges, she believes in the magnet school concept and sees its potential value.

R. Gignac shared how she attended Lyman Memorial in the VOAG program instead of BA. It influenced her career path, giving her opportunities she wouldn't have had otherwise. She emphasized the importance of extending these opportunities to other kids in similar positions. She also noted that she was able to maintain connections with Colchester while being a cheerleader at BA, highlighting the program's ability to give students experiences they may not otherwise have.

M. Millington expressed strong feelings about the benefits this opportunity could provide. She noted that opportunities like this are rare and may not come again. She fully supports the idea of creating new and exciting pathways for students to retain the ones currently enrolled while attracting more. However, she acknowledged the challenges posed by deadlines and factors beyond their control. She is concerned about the misinformation circulating within the community and how it is impacting perceptions of the project.

D. Antonacci echoed M. Millington's sentiments about the problematic rollout of the program. She suggested there could have been more transparency regarding the financial aspects. Despite these concerns, she sees this as a great opportunity for the district. She highlighted that the per-pupil expenditure for educating a Colchester student is higher because transportation and special education costs for out-of-district students are covered by the sending district.

C. Rivers shared his regret that the facts weren't presented earlier, as it would have allowed for a more informed discussion a year ago. He acknowledged the complexity of high school schedules but stressed the immense positive impact this opportunity could have on both personal and community levels. He highlighted the value of allowing students to tag onto courses, viewing education as a community effort. While recognizing the importance of differing opinions, he cautioned against rushing the program and possibly closing it prematurely. He believes the right approach for the community is to pause and proceed thoughtfully.

M. Gignac reflected on how worthwhile projects, like the senior center, often take time and face challenges. She emphasized that this is not an investment in the building itself but in the people who will occupy it. While there is significant support for the program, she noted there is also a lot of misinformation. She clarified that communications should go to the BOE, not the BOF or BOS, and addressed concerns about class sizes, explaining differences between elementary and high school schedules. She pointed out that all students are eligible to apply for free and reduced lunch and explained that no referendum was required because the magnet program falls under curriculum. She also highlighted the need to remove portables regardless of the program, the benefits of diversity, and the fact that CREC will not run the program—it will be managed by local administration. She suggested pausing the decision to allow for more feedback, surveys, and a tri-board meeting before making a final decision.

A.Oliphant stated that he came to listen and address concerns. He expressed his support for creating more pathways for students and acknowledged the issue of declining enrollment, which extends even to colleges. He shared concerns similar to those raised by M. Millington, S. Tracey-Calash, and C.Rivers, emphasizing that the program cannot move forward without community support. He acknowledged that the rollout and communication were not handled as well as they should have been and noted the tight state-imposed deadlines, saying more time would have been ideal.

**Motion by:** M. Gignac

Motion to continue into mid January, when we can find a time for all seven Board Members to attend a meeting, giving administration time to roll out, schedule community meetings, a joint meeting with BOS and BOF, with community input and make a fully informed decision.

**Second:** R. Gignac

**Roll Call:** 4 Yes' from R. Gignac, M. Millington, D. Antonacci and M. Gignac.
3 No's from S. Tracey-Calash, C. Rivers and A.Oliphant

**Vote:** Motion carried

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by:** M. Gignac
Motion to adjourn.
**Second:** C. Rivers
**Roll Call:** All in favor
**Vote:** Motion carried

Chair Oliphant adjourned the meeting at 7:56 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Alyssa Fratoni
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent